Shared Reading: “O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman

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| **Day** | **Content** | **Structure** |
| 1 | * Previewing and setting a purpose for reading * Teaching point: extended metaphor   This is good …. You can also point out that “Underground Railroad” is a type of extended metaphor they might be familiar with | * This week we are going to be looking at a poem by a very famous American poet, Walt Whitman. This is a poem that Walt Whitman wrote after Abraham Lincoln—the president who was in office during the Civil War—was assassinated, or killed. * Now, the poem is called O President! My President. And the poem doesn’t include the words “Abraham Lincoln” or “Civil War.” * Instead, Walt Whitman tells us, as readers, about Abraham Lincoln and about the Civil War through an extended metaphor. * What’s a metaphor? (when we describe one thing by calling it another thing…for example, “Her eyes were two blue oceans.” Her eyes weren’t *really* oceans, but this tells me that they were big, and blue, and maybe shining like the ocean. Or “After walking in the snow for an hour, my toes were ice cubes!”) * In this poem, Whitman uses an extended metaphor—that means he uses the same comparison for the entire poem. * In this poem, Whitman writes about a ship’s Captain—and that represents Lincoln. The ship is the US, and the storm is the Civil War. * Knowing that, listen while I read the poem. What do you think Whitman might be telling us about Lincoln or about the war, based on this poem? * Read poem. * Ask for responses. * Choral read poem to close. |
| 2 | * Teaching point: Deciphering new and unfamiliar vocabulary | * In this poem, Whitman uses a lot of poetic language and advanced vocabulary. In some parts, Whitman uses words we know in new ways. * In order to understand this poem—and all poetry—we as readers need to pay careful attention to the poet’s word choices. * For example, Whitman writes, “*The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;”* * I know the word weather, but I’m used to seeing it as a noun, not a verb like it is here in this sentence. And rack is a word I know, like a coat rack, but that doesn’t make sense in this context. The end of the sentence says, “the prize we sought—or wanted—is won” so I think that weathering every rack has something to do with doing something challenging to get what you want—the prize. * Read on with a partner. Find a spot where you see a new word—or an old word being used in a new way—and see if you can work together to puzzle through what it might mean. * Listen to partnerships share * Choral read to close. |
| 3 | * Teaching point: re-stating poetry is one way to understand it | * This week, we’ve been looking at a very complicated poem. It’s so complex, lots of people don’t read this poem until they are in college! And even then, it can be confusing. ☺ * One way readers of poetry make sense of complicated poems is by restating them in their own words. When we go through a poem and pick out the important ideas, we can re-state them in a simpler way. * Watch while I try to re-state some of the ideas in the first stanza. Great! * “O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip is done” *Oh leader/Abe Lincoln, our scary journey is over.* * “The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won.” *We’ve been through something really hard, and gotten what we wanted in the end.* * “The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting” *We’re almost to shore—to home—and I can hear people celebrating.* * What about this next line, “While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring.” How else could we say some of those ideas? * I want you to try, in partnerships, to re-state some of the big ideas in this poem in your own words. You could go line by line, or combine a few lines. * Listen to responses. * Choral read to close. |

Rachel,

This is a good plan. We could also give them the poem in two columns …. On the left are Whitman’s words, and on the right are blank lines for them to write in their words (it’s a form of personal response). We might need to unpack some of the “ship” vocab for them. Thoughts?

Maureen